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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the prevailing theoretical orientation of the "free play" curriculum in New Zealand child care centers. It also introduces an alternative way of understanding how children learn and discusses a literacy-centered curriculum that uses aspects of the free play and alternative curricula. Child care centers in New Zealand typically use a free play curriculum based on Piaget's theory that child development consists of passage through predetermined stages. Social experience and interpersonal behavior play a secondary role. An alternative curriculum is based on the work of other theorists, such as Vygotsky. The elements of an alternative curriculum are: (1) scaffolding, or the practice of an adult helping a child acquire knowledge or a skill that the child could not acquire alone; (2) access, or the provision of appropriate written materials in the home and school; and (3) mediation of the child's learning by adults. A curriculum centered around literacy would combine attributes of a free play and an alternative curriculum. Ways of promoting literacy development include access to a library, provision of a print-rich environment, a curriculum that integrates literacy into theme learning, and a classroom design that encourages multimedia construction. A list of 29 references is provided. (BC)

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Emergent literacy in New Zealand: An examination of promotion and practices in early childhood centres.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is part of a doctoral proposal designed to gather together available information about the practices and promotion of emergent literacy in New Zealand. This raises questions about what parents and teachers consider to be "normal" development in early childhood in New Zealand and demands investigation of how such constructions are promoted in the various early childhood centres and in the home. This will involve exploring the theoretical base of the "free play" curriculum, and the implications such a curriculum has for learning. The paper will discuss an alternative curriculum which may aid the development of literacy skills, promote socialization in the centre between teacher and child, and promote reading achievement later on in the primary school. A Vygotskian model of "scaffolded" literacy development, and a literacy centred curriculum will be explored as alternatives.

INTRODUCTION

For many years, the preschool years in New Zealand were seen as the period for getting children "ready" for formal instruction upon starting school at the age of five. Many early childhood centres, particularly the Playcentre movement, have espoused the notion of a "free play curriculum" as a reflection of their philosophy of child centred, active learning through play. The influence of "free play" is reflected in the curriculum of many New Zealand Kindergartens and childcare centres to various degrees.

Research in recent years has highlighted the importance of these years for learning the concepts and functions of reading and writing, skills which are built upon during formal education. Many centres encouraged "pre-reading" activities as a way to promote the easy transition to school. However, recent research into emergent literacy suggests that children develop literacy skills long before they reach school, and that this emergent literacy is an integral part of later literacy. A "literacy-rich" and "scaffolded" learning environment is proposed as the ideal context in which to develop a knowledge of literacy in a culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate manner.

The present paper will outline the direction and focus of my doctoral research. This research will set out to examine what understandings parents and teachers have of their children's development and how this reflects in their practices. Second, it will investigate what the policy and practices of parents and teachers towards emergent literacy are in New Zealand early childhood centres. I intend to base the research around the Palmerston North area. It will also examine the implications of the Government's new "parents as first teachers" policy. Finally the research will involve designing a "literacy centred curriculum" for New Zealand early childhood centres, and will conduct a small scale trial of this curriculum.

This paper will discuss the three pronged approach which this research will take. First, it will examine the prevailing theoretical orientation of the "free play" curriculum in New Zealand centres, and how this influences what is perceived as "normal"

development. Second, it will introduce an alternative way of understanding how children learn and an alternative curriculum, based on the Vygotskian model of a "scaffolded" learning environment. Finally, it will discuss how a literacy centred curriculum would use the Vygotskian model and the best aspects of the "free play" curriculum to maximize opportunities for children to learn the functions and concepts of reading and writing through their play. Such as curriculum also validates the importance of skilled teaching in early childhood centres.

EXPLORING A "FREE PLAY" CURRICULUM

"New Zealand free play programmes are based on a philosophy of education which sees the child as an active learner with his or her knowledge being constructed rather than acquired" (Meade, 1985, p.112). Meade (1985) states that the "free play" philosophy is very widely accepted in New Zealand childcare centres. The teacher's role in the child's learning is in the provision of direct, personal contact and in the arrangement of the learning environment; space, things, time, people. Meade suggests that the free play approach creates the impression that adults set up the environment and that the children do the rest; which would be chaotic. In reality, teachers have adapted strategies for enhancing learning in a free play programme, but many teachers have difficulty in articulating their reasons for their approach. Lazar (1983) found that some people really deny that there is, or should be, a curriculum. He points out that there is always a curriculum, whether obvious or not. As he stated in 1983 (in Meade, 1985, p.35) :

> Someone selects the materials, the stories and songs. Someone decides on their sequences and availability. Someone rewards or ignores specific behaviours. All of these are curricular decisions. If the teacher is unaware of the educational, social and personal learnings provided by these choices, the child may be cheated, confused or simply pulled in random directions. If the teacher thinks through the goals of the activities, essentially the same materials and activities can be organized into a coherent programme for optimal learning and development.

Although children may gain an understanding of the physical world, through playing with sand, water and blocks; they also learn about the social world of the school

(Tizard and Hughes, 1984). A new code of behaviour is introduced to them, along with routines, how to communicate with staff and how to focus on play. All of these things teach the child what is considered to be appropriate behaviour in a school setting. The play environment gives the child room to explore, make a noise and to make a mess, but learning by observing an adult is excluded. Such a child centred environment, which is designed to encourage self initiated play may be completely inappropriate in cultures, such as the Maori, which place emphasis on the Whanau or the group, and do not recognise the individual. For a child exposed to such cultural differences, school must become an inherently confusing and bewildering place. Similarly, for the child from a Kohanga Reo entering the school system, a new code of behaviour must be learned before they are able to succeed. Any curriculum must be thought about and justified carefully, in order to prevent a simple monocultural reproduction.

The notion of not expressing curriculum goals seems prevalent in New Zealand literature. As Smith and Swain (1988, p.39) state "childcare should have developmental rather than curriculum goals". They further suggest that childcare should encourage dynamic development, toward a greater complexity and diversity of behaviour, rather than teaching specific skills or knowledge. Tizard and Hughes (1984) report that British preschools have clear intellectual aims; in general terms to "develop the child's full potential". Language development is a high priority (through conversation) as are developing basic skills and understanding. Furthering social development is a primary aim, to make the child independent of the mother, to be a member of a group and finally to prepare the child for primary school, listen to staff, follow instructions and so forth. Although Tizard and Hughes (1984) noted that these aims were clearly articulated in most centres, most supervisors were puzzled by the notion of having a curriculum; as they did not promote a specific body of knowledge or skills, which had to be taught in a specific period of time. Instead of teaching, per se, these supervisors saw their role as providing a rich learning environment. In this enriched environment, the play materials provide the curriculum (e.g. shaped, variously sized water containers teach the child concepts of space and volume). Supervisors reported that they encouraged development by

providing a planned environment, in which children learn by self initiated play. Supervisors do not teach reading and writing skills, but propose that they lay the foundations for these to later occur by providing activities that develop pattern recognition, hand-eye coordination, spoken language, and the relationship between stories and printed text (Tizard and Hughes, 1984).

Smith and Swain (1988) propose that intellectual growth is encouraged through play; whereby children can explore and experiment with the environment, stretch thinking and reasoning through making mistakes and actively participate in increasingly complex play. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner (1979, p.60) reinforced the appropriateness of a "free play" philosophy when he addressed New Zealand audiences in 1979. As he said "Learning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment".

Clarke-Stewart (1982) proposes that childcare programmes can be examined along an open-closed dimension. Along the "closed" dimension, learning can be classified in the following way : "she (the teacher) tells the children what to do and when to do it. She gives the class clear and explicit lessons, usually according to a strict schedule" (p.77). An American example of a closed programme would be the Bereiter-Engelman programme. The programme consists of patterned drill, teacher questions and responses, pre-reading and maths activity, in a sparse environment. The goal of such a programme is to increase I.Q. scores and to teach social and intellectual skills relevant to the school situation. A New Zealand example of a closed programme is Dr. Jane Ritchie's Hamilton intervention programme with Maori pre-schoolers. There are also certain parallels with Te Kohanga Reo centre programmes.

By contrast, Clarke-Stewart defines "open" programmes as indirect, individually directed, free to explore and select activities. Interaction is informal, one-to-one and on a flexible schedule. Interaction also revolves around play and materials, rather than an academic curriculum. As Clarke-Stewart (1982, p.77) states "she (the teacher) prepares materials and activities for the children, but then lets them choose among them, going at

their own pace, following their own interests and making discoveries about the world on their own. She guides, encourages, and helps the children in their activities but does not exhort, direct, instruct or restrict them". One example of an "open" programme is Montessori schools in New Zealand, which use carefully prepared educational materials, at which children progress individually. Playcentres use a more relaxed approach, and simply provide the materials and allow children to experiment at their own pace.

A "free play" philosophy is founded upon the belief that the child actively constructs knowledge of the world. Such a view has theoretical roots in Piagetian theory (Wood, 1988). Piaget's theory, which proposes the child as an "active learner", suggests that the child's intercourse with the physical world provides the main constraints and contributions to the development of intelligence; the child learns as she acts upon objects in space and time. In this way it is the "things" of the environment which play a major role in the child's development. This view of child development is reinforced in the New Zealand Charter Handbook by the minimum standards for equipment and by the supervisors in Meade's (1985) study in their emphasis on purchasing bigger and better equipment. Meadows and Cashdan (1988) report that play has been idealised as a spontaneous, absorbing, refreshing, enjoyable, creative, ideal way to learn. Furthermore, play enthusiasts claim that humans need to play in order to learn, to work off surplus energy and to practise skills. Perhaps these claims have some truth, but they do not give a watertight reason for elevating play into the <u>way</u> of learning.

Justifications for a Piaget derived theory of the appropriateness of play as the way to learn in a preschool environment have three major sources (Meadows and Cashdan, 1988, p.49) :

1) <u>Assimilation</u> - according to Piaget, children fit materials to a play scheme, concentrating on those that fit the scheme and ignoring the rest. Later accounts (derived from Piaget) make play a balance between assimilation and accommodation, which implies that play in itself is a deficient way of learning, as it lacks testing against reality.

2) Activity - originally simply being actively involved in play was considered sufficient for learning to occur. More recently, theorists have suggested that "thinking about what has been done" is also required.

3) Readiness - learning is controlled and limited by development. This view advocates that there is no point to accelerating beyond the child's level of development or to teach skills which the child is not ready for. In play, children will choose the activity that they are ready for.

Piaget's theory acknowledges that social experience and interpersonal behaviour are an important part of development, but in his theory they play a limited and secondary role. Social interaction (especially with other children) mainly contributes to development by exposing the child to other points of view, providing opportunity for the child to rethink her own point of view. However, such a change can only occur when the child is in an appropriate state of "readiness" to accommodate a new concept. As Wood (1988) states ".for Piaget, any social facilitation of development only works when the child's own understanding, based on his commerce with nature, is in an appropriate state of readiness for change" (p.16). In contrast, Wood suggests that developmental readiness is an inappropriate way of understanding how children learn. Social interaction between the child, other children and other adults is the means by which Wood proposes that children achieve a "joint construction" of knowledge of the world around them.

In Piaget's view, "thought is internalized action" (Wood, p.19). According to Piagetian theory, any analysis of human knowledge and intelligence must begin with a consideration of motor activity and practical problem solving. It also alerts us to one of his important educational messages, which is that children have to be active and constructive in order to develop their understanding of the world. It is this philosophy which is the impetus behind the "free play" philosophy; children must be active and playing in a stimulating environment in order for them to develop to their full potential. In many ways, such a philosophy takes the responsibility for learning away from the teacher and places it squarely upon the child. After all, if the child fails to learn in the stimulating environment provided, then the teacher can easily conclude that the child did

not have sufficient "potential" to learn beyond the level achieved. Similarly, a structured programme places responsibility for the child to pay attention and to learn answers by repetition and rote learning. Neither open or closed programmes give an equal burden of responsibility for the child's learning to the teacher.

Meadows and Cashdan (1988) cite some recent studies of "free play" programmes in Britain, which provide interesting insights and questions for further research in New Zealand. Tizard et al (1988) report that in their London study, free play observed was brief, simple and low level, possibly because the children were distracted by other materials, other children or that they were not put under any pressure by staff to complete any projects. Staff were rarely involved with children's activities, and there were no sustained games or conversations. More talk was observed between children, than between staff and children. Similarly, Burberry's (1980) Bristol study found that free play was simple and short in duration. There was little adult-child talk and no sustained conversation. Most adult talk was about play or instructive. Sylva and her colleagues (1980) found in the Oxfordshire groups that conversations between staff and children were rare, that there was a lack of challenging activity and that children engaged in only brief and simple play. As Meadows and Cashdan (1988) conclude "It seems clear that a very high proportion of children's free play over the range of preschool centres is pleasant, keeps them busy, and does provide opportunities for learning and practising skills; but there is not much challenge , not much discovery, not much excitement, not much sustained conversation and not much persistence at working something out" (p.37).

In the present research it seems necessary to examine how influential Piagetian theory has been on New Zealand parents and teachers (and childrens) understanding of what can be considered "normal" development in early childhood. The social institution of childhood is "an actively negotiated set of social relationships within which the early years of human life are constituted" (Prout and James, 1990, p.7). The immaturity of children is a biological fact, but the ways in which this immaturity is understood and

made meaningful is a fact of culture. Childhood is both constructed and reconstructed for and by children.

Piagetian theory connects biological and social development. It states that children's activities, their language, play and interactions are significant as symbol markers of their developmental progress, prefiguring the child's participation in the adult world. Piaget does not not see these events as significant to the child's social life or to the social context of childhood. As Prout and James (1990) conclude "the decreasing irrationality of children's play as they mature is taken as a measure of an evolving 'rationality' of thought, charting the ways in which 'primitive' concepts become replaced by sophisticated ideas"(p.11).

In Piaget's account, child development has a particular structure, consisting of a series of predetermined stages, which lead toward the eventual achievement of logical competence. This is the mark of adult rationality. Within such a rational scheme, children are marginalized beings, awaiting temporal passage, through the acquisition of cognitive skill, into the social world of adults (Prout and James, 1990).

Piaget's work has influenced many other accounts of childhood and social practice around children. His account of developmental stages inform western orthodoxies regarding childrearing practice (Urwin, 1985) and Walkerdine (1984) has shown that Piagetian theory lies at the heart of educational thinking and practice. The phrase "it's a phase" or stage is a common biological explanation to the breadkdown of communication or social relationships. It is particularly important to discover how influential Piagetian theory has been on New Zealand parents and teachers regarding their understanding of their children's development and how this understanding influences their literacy practices with their children.

AN ALTERNATIVE CURRICULUM

Tizard and Hughes (1984) accept the notion of the child as an active learner, but suggest that Piaget underestimated the role of verbal exploration, puzzling and thinking,

in the child's cognitive development. In their study of preschoolers at home and at school, Tizard and Hughes noted that children tackled the task of making sense of a world they imperfectly understood, armed with curiosity, logic and persistence. Children were characterised by their persistent intellectual curiosity and were in a permanent state of intellectual disequilibrium. Such a view opposes Piaget's notion that the child is incapable of decentred or logical thinking at this age. In contrast it suggests that the child's view of the world is limited and distorted by an incomplete conceptual framework, rather than lack of logic.

Similarly, Piaget underestimated the importance of the child's interest in the social world of adults and the role that adults can play in helping the child toward understanding through dialogue. Dialogue, in this sense, is in marked contrast to a normal preschool setting, where an adult poses a series of questions to the child about play. On the contrary, "the adult listens to the child's questions and comments, helps to clarify her ideas, and feeds her the information that she asks for" (Tizard and Hughes, 1984, p.254).

Resistance to new ways of thinking about childhood is pervasive (Prout and James, 1990). There is a correspondence between the concepts of social sciences and the ways in which childhood is socially constructed. The inherent Piagetian notions of developmental stages and developmental readiness have been particularly influential in the educational practices with children. Foucault (1977) calls these ingrained practices "regimes of truth". These operate like self fulfilling prophecies. As Prout and James (1990) state "ways of thinking about childhood fuse with institutionalized practices to produce self conscious subjects (teachers, parents, children) who think (and feel) about themselves through the terms of those ways of thinking" (p.23). The 'truth' about themselves and their situation is thus self validating. Breaking into this with another truth (produced by another way of thinking about childhood) may prove difficult.

However, it has become apparent, through the numbers of children needing reading recovery and the numbers of semi-literate adults, that the Piagetian approach, of encouraging children to be independent "active learners", is not helping all children to

learn. The literature on emergent literacy demonstrates that all children have an oral tradition to bring to their education (Heath, 1986) and can , with sensitive and appropriate teaching, develop a meaningful and functional use of language and literacy. One of the ways this can be achieved is through the reconceptualization of the teacher-child or parent-child relationship in learning situations.

Children need sensitive help, from skilled people, with lots of practice and lots of feedback if they are to learn effectively (Meadows and Cashdan, 1988). This may function as a "benevolent apprenticeship"; whereby the senior partner sets up learning episodes for the junior partner, helping her to arrive at satisfactory conclusions of achievement and discovery. The senior partner "scaffolds" (Bruner, 1986) the activity and helps the junior partner to evaluate the results. As the junior partner becomes more proficient, the senior partner lets go and the partnership becomes equal. Children are novices on tasks on which adults have become experts, and it is for this reason that education should be a sharing of expertise. For instance, a sharing of specific expertise may be showing a child how to paint a straight line on paper, but sharing general expertise may involve showing the child the easiest way to hold the paint brush, position the paper or improve a technique. A teacher may demonstrate that there is a metacognitive strategy involved in gaining expertise; to memorize tactics, plan, review results and so forth. If the teacher recounts these strategies verbally, as the task is undertaken, the child may perceive a worth to following similar strategies when she next attempts the task.

In a preschool environment, such "scaffolding" of the child's development can only occur where there are small adult-child ratios and where a commitment is made to talking <u>with</u> the child, rather than <u>to</u> the child. As Tizard and Hughes (1984, p. 261) state "Instead of the present emphasis on fostering play, on devising ingenious ways of using play materials, and on questioning the children about their play, a higher priority would have to be given to widening the children's horizons, extending their general knowledge and listening to them talk".

In contrast to Piaget's view of the "active learner", Bruner and Vygotsky place more emphasis on the role played by a child's culture and its system of symbols (e.g.languages, sciences, books, diagrams, pictures and so on). Bruner and Vygotsky propose that such systems have a dynamic structuring effect on learning and development, as they are not part of the mere "content" of the environment, but part of the structure and of activity (Wood, 1988). As Wood (1988, p.16) concludes "When the child learns a language...he does not simply discover labels to describe and remember significant objects or features of his social and physical environment but ways of construing and constructing the world".

It is for this reason, that it is impossible to divorce the academic study of children's thinking and learning from moral, political and economic issues concerning the resources we allocate to education and the way in which we train teachers. What it means to be a "teacher" depends, after all, on how we construe children as learners.

Vygotsky proposed that a "zone of proximal development" exists between what the child is able to do alone and what she is able to achieve with help from one more knowledgeable or skilled than himself. He proposed two levels of development; the actual or present level (what the child can do on her own, determined by independent problem solving) and the potential level (determined by problem solving which the child can achieve by collaboration with an adult or more competent peer). It is the distance between these two levels that Vygotsky (1978) calls the "zone of proximal development". Vygotsky further suggests that readiness is not only the state of existing knowledge, as Piaget advocates, but is also the capacity to learn with help. Bruner (1986) suggests that the zone of proximal development explains how the more competent assist the young and less competent to reach higher ground from which to reflect more abstractly about the nature of things. In this way, the child's development and mastery of skills is a "cooperatively achieved success" between teacher and pupil (Wood, 1988).

Vygotsky (1978) disagreed with Piaget that thinking and knowing were largely a result of individual reflection on our own activity, and that other people were of minor import. Piaget saw social interaction as a major factor behind cognitive development, but

less important than self generated activities. These activities are largely "egocentric"; that is within the individual, rather than between individuals. According to Piaget, language and the social environment enrich the pattern of thought that the child has already constructed. Vygotsky emphasized what we learn from interacting with others, how we are helped by being taught and what we learn from what we see others do. Vygotsky states "Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (1978, p.88) For Vygotsky, knowledge is social, and what we are able to do is much more a matter of our upbringing and education than our inborn potential; development is very much a product of the child's participation in the social world (Meadows and Cashdan, 1988).

Vygotsky believed that the transmission of mind across history is effected by successive mental sharings that assure a passing on of ideas from the more able or advanced to the less so. The medium in which the transmission occurs is in language and its products; literacy, science, technology and literature.

There are three key terms which are important to an understanding of how a Vygotskian model may be useful to an alternative free play curriculum in New Zealand centres. The first of these is "scaffolding" (Bruner, 1986) or the process whereby an adult or competent peer bridges the zone of proximal development for the child. The adult "ups the ante" in a learning situation, facilitating the child's mastery of a new skill. The other terms which are particularly relevant to a literary centred curriculum are "access" and "mediation". Vygotsky's notion of access and mediation is useful in examining how the process of learning to read is essentially social in nature (Teale and Sulzby, 1987). Access basically means having appropriate written materials in the home or school, although it tends to implicitly assume a mediator to these materials. Teale and Sulzby indicate that this access enables the child to develop concepts about books and reading; directionality, that print (not pictures) convey meaning, how to locate a word and so forth. They also suggest that children that children (from 2-6 years) produce language which is different prosodically and syntactically from their normal conversation when they are asked to "read" a favourite story-book. Mediation is a more complex issue; as

the same story-book can be mediated differently by different teachers, parents or families. Wells (1981, in Teale and Sulzby, 1987) suggests that there is a quantitative difference in the amount of interaction, but also a qualitative difference. He proposes that some parents are more effective mediators and promoters of language development than others. This "eliciting style" has been examined by Ninio (1980) with high SES and low SES mothers, with the finding that low SES mothers were less skilled at eliciting responses. Similarly, Heath (1986) found marked differences in communication between Trackton, Roadville and Mainstream communities.

In Tizard and Hughes (1984) study of preschoolers at home and at school, there were some noteworthy differences observed between teachers and parents, which have important implications for curriculum design. The most outstanding difference noted is that parents play with their children, teach specific skills and impart a tremendous amount of information to their children. This information concerns the child's family, babies, household matters and also more general information about science, history and geography. In contrast, childcare workers talk to children about play and routines, such as picking up toys, listening attentively and following instructions. Tizard and Hughes (1984) conclude that children learn a great deal more in the "scaffolded" environment of the home, despite the inherent difficulties (other children, tired parents, lack of material resources), because of the personally relevant information communicated to the child and the one-to-one teaching.

Meadows and Cashdan (1988) propose their notion of "tutorial dialogue" as the means by which the child can experience one-to-one, personally relevant teaching within a class room environment. Tutorial dialogue is based on the method developed by Marion Blank (1973) for work in a one-to-one situation for regular use with poorly functioning children. Teachers would see a child alone for periods of fifteen minutes. However, Meadows and Cashdan (1988,p.58) have applied the method for use within the classroom, for varying periods across the day. There are eight major principles to "tutorial dialogue" for working with a child:

1) Teaching to an appropriate range of cognitive demands

- not too simple or too difficult

- to cope with different children's strengths and weaknesses (e.g.poor memory or expression).

2) Managing the response - use an array of techniques for poor answers, and try a series of simplifications, in order to put the question again. Matching the child's level and asking her to do slightly difficult things is important in the "scaffolded" relationship, for three reasons:

a) match-mismatch theory of motivation and learning - a small extension is best for learning,

b) the child's idea of school, as a place where demands can be met, where teachers are sensitive to the needs of the child and interested in her as an individual,

c) the child's self image - encourage curiosity and liveliness, and to see herself as successful.

3) Developing a sequential theme and engaging in meaningful tasks

4) Select appropriate materials, associated with the real tasks of everyday life - food, outings, washing, sleeping. Activities could include washing a doll, making biscuits, cutting fruit and so forth.

5) Checking the child's response - create real opportunities for sharing by using subjects or areas in the present context.

6) Pacing the session - create a higher demand at the beginning, helping the child to find answers. Ease the demand toward the end of the dialogue, so the child is left with a sense of success.

7) Giving the session shape :

- a clear statement of intent, e.g. "shall we cut the apple and find out how everyone can have a piece?"

- draw together the threads of the dialogue, remind the child of the salient events and how answers were obtained.

Meadows and Cashdan (1988) suggest that many of these steps become automatic and normally teachers would concentrate on four major steps in the dialogue, which are :

1) deciding on an appropriate task,

2) introducing the task,

3) preserving the sequence,

4) reviewing what has been done.

An intrinsic part of this dialogue is the use of demands and follow-ups, to maintain the coherency of the interaction. Simple demands which the teacher would make of the child are labelling, memory, description, non-verbal demands, imitation, incidental memory, delay and visual search. Harder demands are comparative analysis, cause and effect, imagery/prediction, means-ends relationships, higher level/logical relationships, rationale and word skills. Follow-ups involve attention getting-recapturing, through focus, delay and repetition. Follow-ups also include rephrasing, giving part of an answer, subdividing the task, helping to discard wrong or meaningless answers, presenting comparisons, giving information/demonstrations, asking for fuller responses, repeating a demonstration, relating the known to the unknown, directing action to learn significant characteristics, focussing on relevant features, and substituting action for verbal response.

This section has introduced the idea of an alternative curriculum for New Zealand childcare centres, based upon the Vygotskian notions of access and mediation in a scaffolded learning environment. Although this seems like a move away from the traditional focus of the "free play' curriculum, it is in fact only a reconceptualization. The provision of activities and materials would remain the same, as would the opportunity for children to move at their own pace within the curriculum. However, the role of the early childhood teacher changes by definition. Intuitively, I suspect that many very effective teachers are already providing a scaffolded learning environment for their children, and that they will identify their own behaviour in the stratagems suggested. The focus of this research will be to identify what the practices of parents and teachers are and how literacy is being promoted in New Zealand centres.

A LITERARY CENTRED CURRICULUM

A literary centred curriculum provides one way in which the best attributes of a "free play" curriculum can be combined with a "scaffolded" teaching environment. Ideally the curriculum should be in the mind of the teacher, rather than in a written or structured form, thereby allowing room for spontaneity and creativity. A "scaffolded" learning environment provides greater opportunities for interaction between teacher and child, and also validates the mediation which effective childcare workers are providing.

In 1966, Marie Clay coined the term "emergent literacy" to describe the developmental continuities between emergent literacy behaviour and behaviour employed when the child is able to read independently. Clay's early research showed that children who couldn't read in the full sense of the word, showed sensitivity to letter and word forms, appropriate directional movements, self correction and synchronized matching of spoken word units to written word units. She then concluded "there is nothing in this research that suggests that contact with printed language forms should be withheld from any five year old on the grounds that he is immature" (Clay, 1982, p.22). By five children display the prerequisite parts of reading, and display a knowledge of the form and function of print. Clay's research sparked enormous interest into how children learn the concepts of print before formal instruction, and how a child's developing knowledge of language and literacy can best be facilitated.

Recent literature on emergent literacy firmly states that it is necessary to provide a stimulating environment for early literacy activities, to which all children have access (Teale and Sulzby, 1987). If all children had some experience, in a culturally sensitive manner, of story book reading, questioning, discussion, drama, art, all the things which lay the foundations for literacy to develop, then perhaps the Government would not be spending millions on a Reading Recovery programme. It would make more sense to be putting more money into early childhood, than to be reducing standards and cutting funding. Open access to preschool care and education will not address social class or

socio-economic differences to any significant degree, but it would ensure that all children had some experience of singing nursery rhymes, listening to stories, myths, legends, creating imaginatively via drama, art and musical play; all the skills which will be called upon in the school. It may be as simple as demonstrating a purpose for learning to read.

Wells (1985) states that all children, no matter what their background use language in a wide range of ways. Difficulties arise for the child in a childcare centre because of the specializations of language which are used, such as "classroom language" and "literacy language". Wells suggests that social class differences in 'readiness for school' have less to do with language differences than they have do with differences in activities related to writing and reading.

Most childcare centres would cite promotion of language and literacy skills as part of their curriculum, by the provision of materials and story-time during each session. However, as Meadows and Cashdan (1988) demonstrate, few centres make a great deal of use of the opportunities which story-time may offer. The Child Health and Education Study (CHES) (in Meadows and Cashdan, 1988, p.94) made a survey of all preschool centres in England and Wales on what materials and activities were provided in centres and how often. This study found that 95% of playgroups, 99% of nursery classes and 99% of nursery schools have a "book corner". With the same groups, 86% of playgroups, 92% of nursery classes and 89% of nursery schools practised story book reading to the whole group. Centres considered that provision of materials and story reading was "good practice" and yet the equipment was universally little used, with little spontaneity. As Meadows and Cashdan (1988) conclude, books are traditionally found at the periphery of the curriculum. Story reading is a quiet, passive activity and book corners are often used as areas to quieten distressed children. As van Lierop (1985) states

> if story telling and reading were central to nursery and infant curricula, rather than a gesture at the end of the school day, children would be exposed to a wider range of vocabulary and linguistic structures, they would be awakened to the functions of literacy and the powers of imagination and concentration would be enhanced. If teacher and children were enjoying together the world of print, learning would take place (p.74).

The goals of fostering language development, social interaction and preparation for school could be achieved by centering the curriculum around the use of literacy materials; such a curriculum may also achieve the goals and aspirations of Te Kohanga Reo with the use of culturally appropriate material. The connection between early acquisition of literacy skills and later school achievement has a long history, and is too large a topic to be effectively covered here. However, a few examples seem to be of relevance to mention.

Durkin (1966) found that early reading was due to parental attitudes, mother's interaction with the child and the child's interest in becoming a reader. Similarly, Clark (1976) reported that the mother's attitude was instrumental in facilitating the child's early reading; where the mother was closely involved with the child's literacy activities, found the child to be stimulating companion and enjoyed the verbal interaction. In such homes, a richness of literacy experiences occurred, expressed by the parent's love of books and communicated by reading to the child at an early age. Both studies have important implications for children in childcare centres, as teachers can also facilitate a love of reading by providing a stimulating and interesting environment for the child to experience literacy within.

In order for literacy to develop, experience and learning need to occur in a meaningful context. Van Lierop (1985) reports the example of an early-reader called Sonia, which provides the means by which a literary centred curriculum could be made meaningful. Sonia's early literacy was not grafted artificially onto her experience, but was woven into the fabric of her life. Story books were initially a stimulus, pleasure and comfort. Sonia moved from listening to stories , to picture books and finally to reading independently by the age of two and a half years. Sonia's play was intrinsically tied to current favourite stories.

Donaldson and Reid (1985) state that there are four principles regarding what is entailed in learning to read, which have relevance for the design of a literary centred curriculum :

1) children come to school knowing a great deal about oral language, even though much of the knowledge is not accessible to consciousness in any way that would enable them to speak about it,

2) children are hypothesis testers and rule users by nature,

3) children have a strong drive to make sense of what they encounter, to understand what people mean when they speak and what other people's purposes are,

4) the ways in which language becomes meaningful are more subtle and complex than once supposed.

A "scaffolded" (Bruner, 1986) environment, wherein the teacher develops a literary theme may provide a forum for such skills to be developed. Donaldson and Reid (1982) recommend reading aloud, as it helps to familiarize children with new, more complex linguistic forms, while the living voice helps to bring out the meaning with amplification and explanation if needed.

Meadows and Cashdan (1988) cite the work of their student Christianne Hayward, as a way in which a literary theme may form a "free play" curriculum, in a rich "scaffolded" learning environment. Hayward selected a book of substance to read as a serial over a two to four week period. Classroom activities were generated by the children's experience of the text; e.g. art, construction, role play, science and so forth. Hayward read Richard Adam's "Watership Down" and followed reading of the text with provision of appropriate jigsaws and puzzles, keeping a real rabbit, digging burrows in the sand tray, transforming a "wendy house" into a hill with a burrow underneath, and spontaneous re-enactions of the story line by the children. Testing following the use of this literary theme showed that the children had a greater knowledge of the concepts involved in learning to read, increased vocabulary, an interest in other stories later used as "themes' and books in general.

Martinez and Teale (1988) propose that providing a well designed library in a kindergarten or similar pre-school, with ready access, is an important first step towards establishing a literary centred curriculum. Such a library should have a healthy collection of stories, fables, poetry and informational books with a sense of multi cultural

sensitivity. Martinez and Teale (1988) suggested the following examples of how children used a library and selected books (p.569) :

a) book familiarity - books read by the teacher

b) degree of familiarity - repeated readings give control over organization of text

c) structure - predictable plots with repetitive, cumulative or rhyming patterns

Strickland and Morrow (1988) claim that creating a "print rich" environment is one way of promoting literacy development. They recommend a library centre in pre-school classrooms; with ready access but also a degree of privacy and tranquility, to accommodate five or six children. Comfortable seating, pillows and tables will provide opportunities for settling and enjoying a library corner. A revolving supply of books, multiple copies of favourites and a library "check out" system may maintain interest. Having personally experienced such library set-ups with New Zealand playcentres; there is a definite place for such a system in a pre-school. As long as there is plenty of books with loads of variety, children seem to enjoy the "adult" privilege of selecting and taking home their "reading" books. Morrow (1989) states that well designed classrooms significantly increase the number of children who choose to participate in literacy activities.

Another method of promoting literacy development is proposed by Strickland (1989) who designed a "core experience curriculum". This curriculum integrates language and literacy in a holistic manner using content themes. Strickland suggests that a print rich classroom is essential, with meaningful labels, signs and captions at child level. A strong literature base is a hallmark of this curriculum, as is an environment which invites children to write, read and talk.

The design of a classroom play a significant role in the success of an emergent literacy programme, as positioning of literacy activities and provision of appropriate materials are particularly important. Teale, Sulzby and Kamberelis (1989) found that an emergent literacy curriculum should provide opportunities for multimedia construction -

putting painting and writing areas side by side. Children can be encouraged to publish their own books or exhibitions. Likewise, children should be encouraged to write "stories" before formal writing is achieved, and to share these stories within a small group. Teale, Sulzby and Kamberelis (1989) conclude that classroom libraries, letter writing, name writing and artwork should be encouraged. Similarly, van Lierop (1985) suggests that children can collectively make booklets, centred on their own activities. Such booklets are of high interest and predictability, creating a motivation for reading. Hall (1976) states that as children see their spoken thoughts put onto paper, they can understand the nature of reading and learn to associate spoken words with written language.

Learning within a literary theme may become relevant because it creates a context for play. Learning language and literacy skills will be enhanced by the mediation of the text and subsequent activities by the teacher, conducted within the children's group and providing opportunities for social interaction. As Donaldson and Reid (1985,p.15) conclude "children - and indeed adults much of the time - do not interpret the words alone. What they are basically interested in is to understand what people mean, rather than what words mean. They interpret the words in their setting - both the physical and personal setting - to such an extent that we may speak of the language as being embedded in its context".

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to explore the theoretical roots of the prevailing tradition in many centres of the "free play" curriculum. A contrast is seen between the predominantly "free play" curriculum of Kindergarten, Playcentre and Childcare centres, and the more structured curriculum of Te Kohanga Reo. A Piagetian tradition or the notion of the child as an active learner was seen to be under pinning the "free play" philosophy. The teacher's role in such a curriculum is to provide, select and arrange materials and facilitate a child's interaction with these. The importance of interaction

between teacher and child in a learning situation is secondary to the child's own exploration and discovery.

An alternative, literary centred curriculum is proposed as the means by which the child's learning may be "scaffolded", and the child's progress monitored. A Vygotskian model of access and mediation defines the teacher's role within such a curriculum, wherein the teacher provides a scaffold or bridge across the child's zone of proximal development, helping the child to master new skills. Such a literary centred curriculum may achieve the goal of preparing a child for the language and practises of the classroom, while enjoying the positive benefits of a well designed "free play" environment.

Intuitively, most good childcare workers probably combine elements of "free play" with appropriate "scaffolding" to help children reach their full potential. Dangers arise in centres where workers do not believe that they have a curriculum, by not not recognising the part they play in selecting and mediating materials for children. A literary centred curriculum may provide a focus and important purpose to the early education of our children. For too long, the play of children in childcare centres has been undervalued and has been seen as unrelated to the formal instruction which follows in school. This research will hope to demonstrate that early childhood education is not a luxury or a form of parental neglect, but a valuable opportunity to ensure that all of our children have access to a literary environment, which is mediated in a culturally sensitive and meaningful manner.

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